

Identifying and Helping Those Who Need It

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It's time to work on YOU. So sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

Thurgood Marshall - a lawyer and civil rights activist who served on the United States Supreme Court - once said

None of us got where we are solely by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. We got here because somebody - a parent, a teacher, an Ivy League crony, or a few nuns - bent down and helped us pick up our boots.

The Beatles became as successful as they were in large part because of George Martin, their producer, who was often referred to as the fifth Beatle. Not only would Martin make suggestions about which songs should go on their albums, the groundbreaking recording techniques he used created some of the iconic instrumentals on their most famous songs. And Elton John wouldn't have risen to fame without his long-term collaboration with Bernie Taupin, who wrote the lyrics to most of Elton John's songs.

While these are exceptional examples of how the help of others can impact someone's life, helping others with more day-to-day activities can be as powerful for the person you are helping as grand gestures or a one-time fix can have. This is especially true if someone is struggling

with their mental health and well-being, and is depressed, anxious, overwhelmed, or worried. And besides the obvious 'they need help' motive for helping someone, there are plenty of other reasons to lend a helping hand.

According to Action For Happiness, a U.K.-based charity committed to building a happier and more caring society,

scientific studies show that helping others boosts happiness. It increases life satisfaction, provides a sense of meaning, increases feelings of competence, improves our mood, and reduces stress. It can help to take our minds off our own troubles too. Kindness towards others is the glue that connects individual happiness with the wider community and societal wellbeing. Giving to others helps us connect with people and meets one of our basic human needs - relatedness.

Helping others creates a win-win situation. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." In fact, in her TED Talk *Helping others makes us happier – but it matters how we do it*, social psychologist Elizabeth Dunn reminds us to, "stop thinking about giving as just this moral obligation and start thinking of it as a source of pleasure."

But how exactly do we go about identifying who needs our help? The 'pay it forward' idea is great and can make someone's day, but it might not be the most impactful way to help out. Every Life Matters, another U.K.-based support charity, describes some tell-tale signs that someone is struggling.

First, pay attention to what someone is talking about. Are they complaining about not feeling well all the time? Do they often talk about their worries and fears? Have they told you they lack energy or that they're tired all the time? Do they still find joy in the activities they would normally enjoy? If someone is constantly sick, anxious, worried, lethargic, tired, or no longer engaging in the activities and hobbies they once loved, that person might be in distress and in need of help.

You can also pay attention to someone's behavior. Do they seem sad? Do they appear to have stopped caring for themselves? Have you noticed changes in their appetite or how much they've been sleeping? Have they stopped returning calls or texts? Are they more irritable or angry than usual? Do they struggle to make decisions? If the answer to some of these questions is 'yes,' then that person could be struggling with their mental health. While someone who finds themselves in this situation might benefit most from professional therapy, letting them know that you're there for them as someone to listen to their troubles, or just as a friendly face to sit with, can make a monumental difference. Every Life Matters states,

the smallest displays of kindness, like picking up the phone to check in on someone - and the conversation that follows - could make the difference. You don't need to solve their problems and knowing someone cares could be enough to get them through.

So, what are some ways we *can* actually help someone? And when should we offer help? What we offer doesn't have to be grandiose. Sometimes the small stuff can be the most effective. Action For Happiness suggests "*giving to others can be as simple as a single kind word, smile or a thoughtful gesture. It can include giving time, care, skills, thought, or attention.*" Knowing that you care can mean more than even a simple act of kindness. Jenny Santi, philanthropy advisor and author of *The Giving Way to Happiness: Stories & Science Behind the Life-Changing Power of Giving*, suggests that giving your time to others is more satisfying than gift-giving. She says, "we don't all have the same amount of money, but we all do have time on our hands and can give some of this time to help others."

Every Life Matters outlines what they call "five simple steps to helping." These steps are being aware, asking, listening, building support, and checking in. It's easy to get distracted by our phones constantly going off and friends, family members, and colleagues vying for our attention, but if we focus on those around us and be aware of what's going on with them, it will become easier to identify when something just isn't right with someone who might need our help. And if it's not clear, ask. A simple, 'how have you been feeling?' or 'is everything ok?' might be enough of a prompt to allow someone to open up. It gives them the opportunity to share when they might not have otherwise thought it was the right time or place to do so. And once they do open up, listen. Pay attention to what they're saying, and look for the nonverbal cues they might be giving you. Put your phone on silent and close the door so no one can interrupt you. Be fully present, listening with the intent to understand, not just to respond. Let them know you're there for them and able to support them in whatever way they need. And don't assume you know what they need or what is best for them. If they don't make clear what they need or how you can help, ask. And be sure to check in on them on a regular basis. Following through on your offer for help and support is critical in actually helping someone.

Now that you know how to identify when someone is struggling and ways you can help those in need, get out there this week and do it. As much as we want to be fully independent, there will come a time when each of us will need help with something. And when the help we need isn't just a body to help move furniture or someone to water our plants while we're away, but emotional support because we're struggling with stress, depression, worry, and anxiety, we'll be grateful that someone recognized our struggle and reached out to lend a helping hand.

That's all for today. Thanks for listening.

Reading List

[Article] [The Secret to Happiness Is Helping Others](#), Jenny Santi

[Article] [Helping Others](#), Every Life Matters

[Article] [Do Things For Others](#), Action For Happiness

[Book] [The Giving Way to Happiness: Stories and Science Behind the Life-Changing Power of Giving](#), Jenny Santi

[Video] [Helping others makes us happier – but it matters how we do it](#), Elizabeth Dunn

